



University of Groningen

## Philosophical Criticism of Genealogical Claims and Stoic Depoliticization of Politics

van Kooten, G.H.

*Published in:*

Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2010

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

van Kooten, G. H. (2010). Philosophical Criticism of Genealogical Claims and Stoic Depoliticization of Politics: Graeco-Roman Strategies in Paul's Allegorical Interpretation of Hagar and Sarah (Gal4:21 -31). In G. H. van Kooten, M. Goodman, & J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten (Eds.), *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (pp. 361-385). (Themes in Biblical Narrative; No. 13). Leiden/Boston: Martinus Nijhoff/Brill.

### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

PHILOSOPHICAL CRITICISM OF GENEALOGICAL  
CLAIMS AND STOIC DEPOLITICIZATION OF POLITICS:  
GRECO-ROMAN STRATEGIES IN PAUL'S ALLEGORICAL  
INTERPRETATION OF HAGAR AND SARAH (GAL 4:21–31)

George H. van Kooten

1. INTRODUCTION

The figure of Hagar is not referred to by name in the New Testament writings, with the notable exception of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (4:24–25). In this letter Paul wishes to define the nascent Christian movement within Judaism as a universalistic kind of Judaism. In doing so he develops a Christian historiography which revolves around the figures of Abraham, Moses, and Christ. In Paul's view, Judaism, of which Christianity is part, is in essence an Abrahamic religion, going back to the hybrid figure of Abraham on the threshold between the Chaldean and the Jewish world, whereas Moses is only a secondary figure. This Abrahamic redefinition of (Christian) Judaism takes place in chapter three of Paul's letter (Gal 3:6–29), after he has positioned his Christian Judaism in opposition to the other forms of Judaism (both Christian and non-Christian) of his day in chapters one and two. Surprisingly, after his reflection on the Abraham narrative in chapter three, he returns to this narrative again near the end of chapter four, now focusing on Abraham's children, Ishmael and Isaac, with their respective mothers Hagar and Sarah. While other contributions to this volume deal with the climax of the first Abraham passage in the programmatic statement that "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring" (Gal 3:28–29), or with the way in which the second Abraham passage expresses Paul's covenantal thought,<sup>1</sup> the present paper focuses on the reasons for the

---

<sup>1</sup> See resp. the contributions to this volume by Karin Neutel and Albert Hogeterp. On Gal 3–4, cf. also F. Vouga, "La construction de l'histoire en Galates 3–4," *ZNW* 75 (1984): 259–269.

second passage and, especially, on its explicit inclusion of the figure of Hagar (section 2), and two other remarkable features: its criticism of the relevance of ethnic descent (section 3), and its identification of Hagar and Sarah with the opposite poles of dual citizenship—earthly citizenship as opposed to the citizenship of heaven (section 4). Both motifs, that of claims of ethnic descent and of dual citizenship, will be commented upon with particular attention to the Greco-Roman world. The Galatians, too, were part of this world, after they had passed through Greece in the third century BCE, crossed over to Asia, and “occupied the country on the farther side of the river Sangarius, capturing Ancyra, a city of the Phrygians.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. THE POLEMIC NATURE OF PAUL’S REWORKING OF THE HAGAR NARRATIVE

The reason why Paul, after his elaboration of the Abraham narrative in chapter three, adds a second passage on Abraham at the end of chapter four seems to lie in his wish to strike at the heart of those Jews who regard Judaism as an ethnic religion which depends on the genetic lineage between Jews and Abraham. The first Abraham passage in chapter three is devoted to the burning question: “Who is a son of Abraham,” a question answered in Gal 3:7 (“it is those who have faith who are Abraham’s sons”) and in 3:29 (“So if you belong to Christ, you are the *sperma* of Abraham”).<sup>3</sup> This first Abraham passage is construed in order to define what “real Judaism” is: it is not founded on Moses, whose law is secondary as it only arrived on the scene 430 years after Abraham (3:17), but on Abraham, whose distinctive quality is his trust in God: *ho pistos Abraam* (3:9).

To criticize his opponents even more effectively, Paul adds a second Abraham passage at the end of chapter four, in which he confronts his opponents with the statement that Abraham had *two* sons, i.e., not just Isaac, whom Jews consider to be the “legitimate” child, but Ishmael, too: “Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had *two* sons . . .” (Gal 4:21–22;

<sup>2</sup> Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.3.5–1.4.6.

<sup>3</sup> Translations from the Bible are normally taken from the NRSV, with small alterations where necessary, and those from classical authors are normally derived from the Loeb Classical Library, again with occasional changes.

italics mine). The second Abraham passage starts suddenly at a point at which Paul could have drawn the letter to a close but instead starts again. This passage is even more polemic as its blunt statement “that Abraham had two sons” will have been perceived as a provocative remark by those Jews and Christian Jews who regarded themselves as “sons of Abraham” in virtue of their genetic descent from *the* son of Abraham, i.e., Isaac. Both in Jewish and Christian sources we find the notion that Isaac was Abraham’s only-begotten, sole son. Although the LXX just depicts Isaac as Abraham’s “beloved son” (Gen 22:2), both Josephus and the author of Hebrews go further, depicting him as *monogenēs*. According to the author of Hebrews,

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He who had received the promises was ready to offer up *his only son*, of whom he had been told, “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you.” He considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

(Heb 11:17–19)

This characterization of Isaac as Abraham’s only, single son (Heb 11:17), is shared by Josephus, according to whom “Isaac was passionately beloved of his father Abraham, being his only son (*monogenēs*) and born to him ‘on the threshold of old age’ through the bounty of God” (A.J. 1.222). It is interesting to see how Josephus acknowledges the fact that Ishmael and his descendents are related to Abraham, but in his depiction of these relations carefully avoids the terminology of sonship:

When the child reached manhood, his mother found him a wife of that Egyptian race whence she herself had originally sprung; and by her twelve sons in all were born to Ishmael, Nabaioth(es), Kedar, Abdeël, Massam, Masma, Idum(as), Masmes, Chodam, Thaiman, Jetur, Naphais, Kadmas. These occupied the whole country extending from the Euphrates to the Red Sea and called it Nabatene. And it is these who conferred their names on the Arabian nation and its tribes in honour both of their own excellence and of the fame of Abraham (εἰσι δὲ οὗτοι, οἱ τὸ τῶν Ἀράβων ἔθνος καὶ τὰς φυλὰς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καλοῦσι διὰ τε τὴν ἀρετὴν αὐτῶν καὶ τὸ Ἀβραάμου ἀξίωμα).

(Josephus, A.J. 1.220–221)

According to Josephus, the descents of Ishmael make up τὸ τῶν Ἀράβων ἔθνος (“the nation of the Arabs”) and it is this very name, “Arabs,” as Josephus seems to suggest, which reflects (a) their ἀρετή (“excellence”), and (b) τὸ Ἀβραάμου ἀξίωμα (“the fame of Abraham”). As Thackeray explains in his notes, and is confirmed by Hilhorst in his contribution to this volume, Josephus seems to imply a “connexion of the name Arab with

the first two letters of ἄρ-ετή and of Ἀβ-ράμος.”<sup>4</sup> Although Josephus assumes a close link between Abraham on the one hand, and Ishmael and his Ar-ab-ian descendants on the other, he does not call Ishmael Abraham’s son, the only-begotten son being Isaac. If being a son of Abraham could only be perceived of, both by non-Christian Jews such as Josephus and by Christian Jews such as the author of Hebrews, as in the line of Abraham—Isaac—Jews, then Paul’s short statement “For it is written that Abraham had *two* sons” (Gal 4:22) really is extremely polemical in itself. This statement also shows why Paul, in his second passage on the Abraham narrative, starts to talk about Hagar. He is not interested in Hagar as such, but only insofar as she is the mother of Abraham’s *other* son. Contrary to other Jews such as Josephus and the author of Hebrews, Paul is of the opinion that Abraham had two sons, and he emphasizes this because this fact undermines a straightforward claim to being sons of Abraham. The question which Paul construes is not whether one is a son of Abraham, but what kind of son, through the genealogical line of Isaac, or through that of Ishmael:

Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise.  
(Gal 4:21–23)

I will refrain from commenting in detail upon this passage and its continuation, but instead will follow two lines of thought in Paul’s argumentation. The entire second Abraham passage seems to unfold from the opening statement that Abraham has two sons. As already explained, this statement allows Paul to call any straightforward claim to Abrahamic sonship into question. As we shall see in the next section, Paul continues by criticizing such ethnic claims, and even inverts them. Subsequently, as we shall see in the last section, within this line of thought Paul opens a second line, in which he identifies the figures of Hagar and Sarah with two different kinds of citizenship, one of an ethnic, earthly nature, the other of a heavenly nature.

---

<sup>4</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Books 1–20 (trans. H.S.J. Thackeray et al.; LCL; Cambridge, Mass., 1930–1965), 5:109nm. Cf. the conclusion to Anthony Hilhorst’s contribution to this volume, pp. 433–434.

### 3. A FIRST LINE OF THOUGHT: CRITICISM AND INVERSION OF ETHNIC AND GENEALOGICAL CLAIMS

#### 3.1. *Paul's Argumentation*

The existence of two sons of Abraham implies that there are two different ethnic lineages, one through Isaac, via his mother Sarah, the other through Ishmael, via his mother Hagar. In this way Paul questions the validity of the argumentation of his Jewish opponents, who seem to claim that only ethnic Jews are sons of Abraham. According to Paul, there are two different genealogies possible. Paul's criticism, however, goes even further. He also inverts the common understanding of these ethnic genealogies by interpreting them in an inverted way by means of a non-literal, allegorical interpretation. Remarkably, Paul views those Jews who stick to their ethnocentric claims of being the sole descendants of Abraham and resist Paul's universalizing understanding of Judaism as descendants of Abraham, not through Sarah, Isaac's mother, but through Hagar, Ishmael's mother. Not the figure of Sarah, but that of Hagar is identified with "Mount Sinai," which is located in Arabia, and "the present Jerusalem":

Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai .... Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem .... But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above; she is free, and she is our mother.

(Gal 4:24–26)

In this passage the ethnic Jews are identified with "Mount Sinai" because they follow the Mosaic law from the Sinai because, as Paul explains in the first Abraham passage in chapter three, they derive their identity from Moses rather than from Abraham, not complying with Paul's universalistic understanding of Judaism. In the current passage they are now described as descendants of Hagar. Paul seems to buttress his inverted identification of these "Mosaic-Sinaitic" Jews with the descendants of Hagar by pointing at their common regional background in Arabia. Both the link between Mount Sinai and Arabia and that between Arabia and Hagar are established in ancient Jewish literature. As we have already seen, Josephus describes the Arabian ethnicity of Ishmael's descendants:

twelve sons in all were born to Ishmael, Nabaioth(es), Kedar, Abdeël, Massam, Masma, Idum(as), Masmes, Chodam, Thaiman, Jetur, Naphais, Kadmas. These occupied the whole country extending from the Euphrates to the Red Sea and called it Nabatene. And it is these who conferred their names on the Arabian nation (*to tōn Arabōn ethnos*) and its tribes.

(Josephus, *A.J.* 1.220–221)

In this way Hagar and her descendants through Ishmael are linked with Arabia. At the same time Mount Sinai is regarded as being situated in the region of Arabia. In his description of Apion's view on Jewish history, Josephus writes that Apion "tells us . . . that Moses went up into the mountain called Sinai, which lies between Egypt and Arabia" (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.25).

This link between Arabia with, on the one hand, Hagar, and, on the other hand, Sinai, seems to support Paul's implication that non-true, law-observing Jews are descendants of Hagar and that their views reflect Arabian-Sinaitic-Mosaic backgrounds rather than the true Jewishness which starts with Abraham. As he has already pointed out in the first Abraham passage, the Mosaic law came 430 years after Abraham (Gal 3:17). Now in the second Abraham passage, the Mosaic law is not only chronologically but also geographically restricted by Paul's emphasis on its origins in the region of Arabia, hence the close identification of the Sinaitic-Mosaic Jews with Hagar, whose descendants occupy the same territory. Other Jews, however, such as Paul and other Jewish participants in his missionary movement, and ex-pagan Greeks such as the Galatians (if Paul can persuade them!), are descendants of Sarah: "she is our mother" (Gal 4:26). This is emphasized in subsequent lines, in which Paul tries to convince them of their true lineage: "Now you, my friends, are children of the promise, like Isaac . . . . So then, friends, we are children, not of the slave but of the free woman" (Gal 4:28–31). Paul not only criticizes the validity of ethnic reasoning, but also inverts the claims involved; the "true" descendants of Abraham through Sarah and her son Isaac are not ethnocentric Jews, who emphasize their specific, pure, genetic roots, but those who show the character traits of Isaac and his mother.

Artificial as this argumentation might seem, it is not without analogies in Greco-Roman sources. In writings by philosophers such as Plato, Plutarch, and Dio Chrysostom we find similar criticism of genealogical claims, and sometimes also a similar way of inverting these claims.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> For a comparable contextual approach, cf. S. Di Mattei, "Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21–31) in Light of First Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics," *NTS* 52 (2006): 102–122.

### 3.2. *Greco-Roman Criticisms of the Validity of Genealogical Descent*

Analogies for Paul's criticism of ethnic and genealogical claims often relate to Heracles. Many Greek individuals and states claimed to derive from him, and many cities claimed to have been founded by this Greek hero.

#### a. *Plato*

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates is said to find fault with those who trace their lineage to an important figure. According to Socrates, such genealogical claims are very unphilosophical because people tend to ignore those within their lineage who are, for a variety of reasons, less interesting:

And when people sing the praises of lineage and say someone is of noble birth, because he can show seven wealthy ancestors, he [i.e., the philosopher] thinks that such praises betray an altogether dull and narrow vision on the part of those who utter them; because of lack of education they cannot keep their eyes fixed upon the whole and are unable to calculate that every man has had countless thousands of ancestors and progenitors, among whom have been in any instance rich and poor, kings and slaves, barbarians and Greeks.  
(Plato, *Theaet.* 175a)

As a matter of fact, Socrates, in his rebuttal of these claims, comes close to Paul's censure of social and ethnic differentiations (see Gal 3:28), although, differently from Paul, Socrates, in this passage, does not explicitly condemn them as such. Socrates' observation that ethnically pure genealogies are hard to find is also reminiscent of the intention of the author of the Gospel of Matthew, who is keen to mention foreign, non-Jewish women in the genealogy of Jesus; although ultimately descended from Abraham (Matt 1:2), Jesus' lineage runs via disreputable or foreign women such as Tamar and Ruth (Matt 1:3, 5).<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently, as an example of petty and absurd genealogical claims, Socrates mentions those who emphasize their descent from Heracles:

And when people pride themselves on a list of twenty-five ancestors and trace their pedigree back to Heracles, the son of Amphytrion, the pettiness of their ideas seems absurd to him [i.e., the philosopher]; he laughs at them because they cannot free their silly minds of vanity by calculating that

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. U. Luz, *The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew* (trans. J. Bradford Robinson; NTTheol; Cambridge 1995), 26.



Amphitryon's twenty-fifth ancestor was such as fortune happened to make him, and the fiftieth for that matter. In all these cases the philosopher is derided by the common herd, partly because he seems to be contemptuous, partly because he is ignorant of common things and is always in perplexity.  
(Plato, *Theaet.* 175a–b)

The tension mentioned between the philosophers, who criticize such claims, and “the common herd,” which values them, underlines how sensitive people are when their ethnic and genealogical claims are contested. In Plato's *Lysis* a similar example is given of a certain Athenian named Hippothales who, in a poem, stresses his kinship with Heracles in an effort to impress his audience. One of Socrates' interlocutors is extremely critical of Hippothales' claims and characterizes them as “old wives' tales,” while Socrates, in his turn, deems Hippothales ridiculous (*Lysis* 205c).

b. *Plutarch*

Among the Greek states which claimed to derive from Heracles the Spartans figure prominently, together with the Macedonian royal family, which also claims lineal descent from Heracles. In several of his writings the middle-platonist philosopher Plutarch (ca. 50–120 CE) comments on the Spartan claims, and shows that one is only regarded to be a true descendant of Heracles if one emulates Heracles' exemplary character. In his *Apophthegmata Laconica* he quotes Lycurgus, the reputed founder of Classical Sparta's laws and so-called *eunomia* (“good order”). According to Plutarch,

He [i.e., Lycurgus, the lawgiver] made it clear how much instruction contributes for better or worse, saying: “So also in our case, fellow-citizens, noble birth (*eugeneia*), so admired of the multitude, and our being descended from Heracles (*to aph' Hērakleous einai*) does not bestow any advantage, unless we *do* the sort of things for which he was manifestly the most glorious and most noble of all mankind, and unless we practice and learn what is good our whole life long.”

(Plutarch, *Apoph. Lac.* 226A; italics mine)

The message which Lycurgus wishes to convey clearly is that the claim to Heraclid origins is useless unless matched by deeds which resemble those of Heracles. Another illustration of this conviction is found in Plutarch's description of a book on government written by the Spartan general Lysander (d. 385 BCE), in which he even seems to argue that the Spartan kingship should not be hereditary and restricted to the so-called Heraclidae, who were considered to be descendants of Heracles

and comprised both the Agiads (the senior royal house at Sparta) and the Eurypontids (the junior of the two Spartan royal houses), but open to election:

the citizens should take away the kingship from the Eurypontids and the Agiads and put it up for election, and make their choice from the best men, so that this high honour should belong not to those who were descended from Heracles (*hoi aph' Hērakleous*), but to men like Heracles (*hoi hoios Hēraklēs*), who should be selected for their excellence; for it was because of such excellence that Heracles was exalted to divine honours.

(Plutarch, *Apoph. Lac.* 229F)

This view closely resembles Paul's criticism of Jewish genealogical claims. Just as true Jews are not necessarily ethnically and genealogically related to Abraham through Sarah and Isaac but resemble the attitudes and character traits of these exemplary figures, so true Heraclidae are not those who are descended physically from Heracles but are "men like Heracles" who show similar excellence.

That moral excellence is determinative if someone can count as "a true Heraclid" is also shown in the case of Archidamus, one of the Spartan kings who claimed Heraclid origins. Because he tries to incite an opponent to betray a certain stronghold in exchange for large rewards, he is censured for not being a "true Heraclid" for the following reason; his opponent

called Archidamus no true Heraclid, since Heracles had gone about killing malefactors, while Archidamus was making malefactors of honest men, in the same way we must say to one that claims the name of gentleman, if he forces matters and presses an impudent request, that his conduct is unseemly and unworthy of his birth and character.

(Plutarch, *Vit. pud.* 535A–B)<sup>7</sup>

The differentiation which we encounter in these various passages between "true Heraclidae," "men like Heracles," and physical descendants of Heracles who are not worthy of the name and therefore "not true Heraclidae" is comparable to Paul's strategy. By inverting the genealogical claims, Paul characterizes universalistic Jews and pagan Greek-Galatian converts to this universalistic, Abrahamic Judaism as "children of the promise, like Isaac" (Gal 4:28), as "children, not of the slave but of the

<sup>7</sup> Cf. also Plutarch, *Reg. imp. apophth.* 192A: "his reply was that Archidamus was not descended from Heracles, for Heracles, as he went about, punished the bad men, but Archidamus made the good men bad."

free woman" (4:31), as opposed to those who are merely *physei Ioudaioi*, those who are "physically speaking Jews" (2:15). In his Letter to the Romans Paul would return to this differentiation between, on the one hand, calling oneself a Jew and being a Jew outwardly and, on the other, being a Jew inwardly (Rom 2:17, 28–29). Or as he states in the same letter, in terminology closely resembling the issues of his Letter to the Galatians:

For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, and not all of Abraham's children are his true descendants; but "It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named after you." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. (Rom 9:6–8)

Against the background of ethnic and genealogical claims about the true descendants of the important hero figure of Heracles in Greek writings such as those we have analysed above, interesting similarities spring to mind.

### *c. Dio Chrysostom*

A final example of this genealogical debate about Heraclid origins may be derived from the writings of Plutarch's contemporary, the Greek orator and popular philosopher Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40–110 CE). Not only the Spartan kings claimed lineal descent from Heracles, the Macedonian royal family did too. In his fourth oration, *De regno iv* (*Kingship 4*), Dio represents Alexander the Great as conversing with Diogenes the Cynic, who tells him that the real king is a son of Zeus, a sonship which—according to Cynic philosophy—shows itself in one's character, and not by military power and world dominion. Dio censures Alexander for his hereditary understanding of kingship, whereas the animal world of the bees shows that kings are made so by nature and have no need of outward badges, and do not inherit this kingship:

"It is the badge of the bees," he [i.e., Diogenes] replied, "that the king wears. Have you not heard that there is a king among the bees, made so by nature, who does not hold office by virtue of what you people who trace your descent from Heracles call inheritance?"

(Dio Chrysostom, 4 *Regn.* 62 [Or. 4])

Already at this stage Diogenes seems to include Alexander's genealogical claim to Heraclid origins in his criticism. This comes more clearly to the fore when the conversation between both men becomes even more heated when Diogenes utters the following criticism and forces Alexander to respond:

"Therefore, O perverse man, do not attempt to be king before you have attained to wisdom. And in the meantime," he [i.e., Diogenes] added, "it is better not to give orders to others but to live in solitude, clothed in a sheepskin." "You," he [i.e., Alexander] objected, "do you bid me, Alexander, of the stock of Heracles, to don a sheepskin—me, the leader of the Greeks and king of the Macedonians?" (Dio Chrysostom, 4 *Regn.* 70 [Or. 4])

In a similar way to that we encountered in Plutarch, Dio's Diogenes, too, implies that being a true Heraclid means that one emulates the exemplary character and deeds of Heracles rather than claiming to be his physical descendant: "if you will drop your conceit and your present occupations, you will be a king, not in word maybe, but in reality; and you will prevail over all women as well as all men, as did Heracles, whom you claim as an ancestor of yours." (Dio Chrysostom, 4 *Regn.* 72 [Or. 4])

It is remarkable that Paul's criticism and inversion of Jewish claims of Abrahamic origins is in many respects similar to the Greek philosophical critique of the numerous genealogical claims which Greek individuals or states lay to Heraclid origins. It may well be that Paul was acquainted with such claims and subsequent philosophical criticism. After all, Tarsus itself was reputedly founded by Heracles, and in his thirty-third oration, *Tarsica prior* (*First Tarsic Discourse*), in which he publicly addresses the inhabitants of Tarsus, Dio Chrysostom employs the same kind of critique as in his censure of claims to Heraclid origins by individuals and states. In strong language he inveighs against their moral decay and threatens them with an unexpected, anonymous visit by Heracles to the city he founded:

neither its name nor its antiquity nor its renown are spared by you. What would you think, if, just as you might reasonably expect (and as men report) that founding heroes or deities would often visit the cities they have founded, invisible to everybody else (both at sacrificial rites and at certain other public festivals)—if, I ask you, your own founder, Heracles, should visit you (attracted, let us say, by a funeral pyre such as you construct with special magnificence in his honour), do you think he would be extremely pleased to hear such a sound? (Dio Chrysostom, 1 *Tars.* 47 [Or. 33])<sup>8</sup>

It seems likely, then, that Paul must have been aware of the frequent and manifold claims to Heraclid origins made by cities, individuals and states, and also of the philosophical critique of such claims. The criticism which philosophers such as Plato, Plutarch, and Dio Chrysostom issued against those who traced their genealogy to Heracles was frequent and is likely to have attracted Paul's attention. They not only criticize such genealogical

<sup>8</sup> For Tarsus as a Heraclid foundation, see also Dio Chrysostom, 1 *Tars.* 1 [Or. 33].

claims but sometimes also invert them, in the sense that true Heraclids are those who emulate Heracles' exemplary behaviour, even if they are not genetically related. The same strategy is visible in Paul's Letter to the Galatians, in the second passage on Abraham. It may well be that Paul, as I have already suggested, was familiar with the philosophical critique of Heraclid origins. But it may also be that such ethnic-genealogical debates engendered the same kind of criticism. In any case, Paul's strategy is not without contemporary analogies. Yet the degree to which Paul extends his criticism of the genealogy of Abrahamic origins to include a full-scale review of the ethnic identity of the Jews seems unprecedented.

#### 4. A SECOND LINE OF THOUGHT: THE EARTHLY VERSUS THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM—PAUL'S APPROPRIATION OF THE PLATONIC-STOIC DOCTRINE OF DUAL CITIZENSHIP

Paul not only identifies the Mosaic-Sinaitic Jews with Hagar, but within this line of thought he opens a second line by identifying Hagar in turn with "the present Jerusalem," whereas Sarah is associated with "the Jerusalem above":

One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. Now *Hagar* is Mount Sinai in Arabia and *corresponds to the present Jerusalem*, for she is in slavery with her children. *But the other woman corresponds to the Jerusalem above*; she is free, and she is our mother.

(Gal 4:24–26)

I shall return to the description of "the present Jerusalem" in terms of slavery (Gal 4:25) later. I would now like to draw attention to the antithesis in this passage between "the present Jerusalem" and "the Jerusalem above." It is the latter which, from Paul's perspective, is described as "our mother." This is remarkable because both Jews and non-Jews would normally regard the present, earthly Jerusalem as the *mētropolis* of the Jews. Both Strabo and Josephus call Jerusalem *mētropolis* in the sense of capital city (Strabo, *Geogr.* 16.2.28; Josephus, *A.J.* 11.160; *B.J.* 2.517, 626; 4.234), whereas Philo calls Jerusalem *mētropolis* in the sense of the mother-city of the Jewish colonies in the Diaspora:

As for the holy city, I must say what befits me to say. While she, as I have said is my native city (*patris*) she is also the mother-city (*mētropolis*) not of one country Judea but of most of the others in virtue of the colonies sent out at divers times to the neighbouring lands Egypt, Phoenicia, the part of Syria called the Hollow and the rest as well and the lands lying far apart . . . . And not only are the mainlands full of Jewish colonies but also the most

highly esteemed of the islands Euboea, Cyprus, Crete. I say nothing of the countries beyond the Euphrates . . . . So that if my own home-city (*patris*) is granted a share of your goodwill [i.e., the goodwill of Gaius Caligula] the benefit extends not to one city but to myriads of the others situated in every region of the inhabited world whether in Europe or in Asia or in Libya, whether in the mainlands or on the islands, whether it be seaboard or inland. (Philo, *Legat.* 281–283)

Apart from the small difference in meaning, Philo's use of the term *mētropolis* largely agrees with the way Strabo and Josephus apply it, as in all these occurrences the term has a literal meaning and points to the earthly Jerusalem, whether it be as capital city of the Jewish-Judean country or as mother-city of the Jewish colonies. Paul, however, regards the *heavenly* city of Jerusalem as his mother. Paul spiritualizes the *mētropolis* terminology and charges it with the philosophical meaning we encounter in authors like Plato and the Stoics.

a. *Plato, the Stoics, and Seneca*

Paul's antithesis between an earthly and a heavenly city is strongly reminiscent of Plato's reference to the ideal city, which is searched for in vain on earth, and contrasted with the city of one's birth. When in the *Respublica* Socrates is asked whether the "sage," the wise man, would take part in politics, he answers as follows:

"Yes, by the dog," said I, "in his own city he certainly will, yet perhaps not in *the city of his birth*, except in some providential conjuncture." "I understand," he [i.e., Glaucon] said; "you mean the city whose establishment we have described, *the city whose home is in the ideal*; for I think that it can be found nowhere on earth." "Well," said I, "perhaps there is a pattern of it laid up in heaven for him who wishes to contemplate it and so beholding to constitute himself its citizen. But it makes no difference whether it exists now or ever will come into being. The politics of this city only will be his and of none other." (Plato, *Resp.* 9.592a–b)

The same antithesis between an earthly city, of which one becomes a citizen by birth, and the ideal city in heaven, of which one can become a citizen, is also found in Paul's Letter to the Galatians. The passage from Plato has become very influential in history. As Shorey rightly remarks, "This is one of the most famous passages in Plato, and a source of the idea of the City of God among both Stoics and Christians."<sup>9</sup> It is notably the Stoics who develop a full-scale theory of the cosmic city, as Schofield has demonstrated in his ground-breaking monograph entitled *The Stoic Idea*

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *The Republic* (trans. P. Shorey; LCL; Cambridge, Mass., 1935), 6:414–415nb.

of the City (1991).<sup>10</sup> The doctrine was developed by Stoic philosophers such as Zeno and Chrysippus; they emphasized that there is not only the responsibility of one's city of birth, but that one should also develop a moral affinity with, and orientation (*oikeiōsis*) towards all human beings. In this way they shaped the Stoic doctrine of dual citizenship, a notion which was adopted by Roman Stoics such as Seneca. As Morford phrases it, in his study *The Roman Philosophers*:

The idea of *oikeiōsis* towards all humankind, first articulated by Zeno, was extended by Chrysippus, in his work *On Nature*, to the "community of all rational beings who are citizens of the universe", including gods and humankind. Thus the possibility of dual citizenship was created: one was a citizen of Rome or Athens, but also of the community of all human and divine beings. For Seneca this was the solution to the dilemma of political participation.<sup>11</sup>

In Seneca's *De otio* we encounter the same differentiation as in Plato between the city "to which we have been assigned by the accident of birth," and the other city "which embraces alike gods and men," and belongs to all, and not "to some particular race of men":

Let us grasp the idea that there are two commonwealths (*Duas res publicas animo complectamur . . .*)—the one, a vast and truly common state, which embraces alike gods and men, in which we look neither to this corner of earth nor to that, but measure the bounds of our citizenship by the path of the sun; the other, the one to which we have been assigned by the accident of birth. This will be the commonwealth of the Athenians or of the Carthaginians, or of any other city that belongs, not to all, but to some particular race of men. Some yield service to both commonwealths at the same time—to the greater and to the lesser—some only to the lesser, some only to the greater.

(Seneca, *De otio* 4.1)

Human beings can thus be citizens of both cities at the same time, but do not necessarily render their service to both cities or commonwealths.

---

<sup>10</sup> The most important studies are M. Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge 1991; repr. with a new foreword by M.C. Nussbaum and a new epilogue by M. Schofield, Chicago 1999); M. Schofield, "Social and Political Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (ed. K. Algra et al.; Cambridge 1999), 739–770; M. Schofield, "Epicurean and Stoic Political Thought," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (ed. C. Rowe and M. Schofield; CHPT 3; Cambridge 2000), 435–456; D. Obbink, "The Stoic Sage in the Cosmic City," in *Topics in Stoic Philosophy* (ed. K. Ierodiakonou; Oxford 1999), 7, 178–195; E. Brown, "The Emergence of Natural Law and the Cosmopolis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought* (ed. S. Salkever; New York 2009), 331–363 at 356–360 ("The Cosmos As a Polis").

<sup>11</sup> M. Morford, *The Roman Philosophers: From the Time of Cato the Censor to the Death of Marcus Aurelius* (London 2002), 180–182.

According to Seneca, philosophers such as Zeno and Chrysippus only served the interests of the cosmic city, and in doing so gave expression to their universalism:

Our school at any rate is ready to say that both Zeno and Chrysippus accomplished greater things than if they had led armies, held public office, and framed laws. The laws they framed were not for one state only, but for the whole human race. Why, therefore, should such leisure at this not be fitting for the good man, who by means of it may govern the ages to come, and speak, not to the ears of the few, but to the ears of all men of all nations (*... nec apud paucos contionetur, sed apud omnis omnium gentium homines*), both those who now are and those who shall be?

(Seneca, *De otio* 6.4)

This passage, in its wish to speak “to the ears of all men of all nations,” almost has a Pauline ring to it.

Although strictly speaking Seneca develops a doctrine of dual citizenship, his predilection for the cosmic city also becomes visible in the fact that he criticizes the earthly city and states that the wise man has a problematic relationship to the cities of the earth:

... he is nowhere to find a state. Besides, no state will ever be available to the fastidious searcher. I ask you to what state should the wise man attach himself? To that of the Athenians, in which Socrates was sentenced to death, from which Aristotle fled to avoid being sentenced? In which all the virtues are crushed by envy? Surely you will say that no wise man will wish to attach himself to this state. Shall the wise man, then, attach himself to the state of the Carthaginians ...? From this state also will he flee. If I should attempt to enumerate them one by one, I should not find a single one which could tolerate the wise man or which the wise man could tolerate.

(Seneca, *De otio* 8.1–3)<sup>12</sup>

On the basis of such passages, it becomes clear that the Stoic doctrine of dual citizenship entails, at least potentially but often also actually, a strong criticism of the earthly city. This is also the case in the passage from Paul under consideration. According to him, “the present Jerusalem ... is in slavery with her children,” whereas “the Jerusalem above ... is free” (Gal 4:25–26). It seems that Paul’s description of the earthly Jerusalem as being “in slavery with her children” also hints at the political situation of Jerusalem in the 50s CE. Although the theme of slavery is introduced with the figure of Hagar, who is Abraham’s young female slave (Gal 4:22–24, 30–31), and a important theme of the Letter to

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Epictetus on Diogenes the Cynic: “for him alone the whole world, and no special place, was his fatherland” (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.24.64–66).



the Galatians insofar as both non-Christian Jews and pagan Galatians are considered to be *enslaved* to the elements of the cosmos (4:3),<sup>13</sup> it seems that Paul's emphatic characterization of the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem as enslaved and free (4:25–26) reflects the political situation of his time. I will now draw on a comparable text by Dio Chrysostom who also discusses the Stoic doctrine of two cities within the context of the endangered situation of a particular city. This text consists of Dio's thirty-sixth oration and also shows other points of comparison with Paul.

b. *Dio Chrysostom*

In his thirty-sixth oration, *Borysthenitica* (*Borysthenic Discourse*), Dio Chrysostom tells an audience in his home town that he recently visited the city of Borysthenes, a city in Pontus, on the edges of the Greco-Roman cultural and political sphere. As Dio lets us know, Borysthenes is an ancient Greek foundation (*Borysth.* 18 [Or. 36]) but has for some time experienced a steady decline:

The city of Borysthenes, as to its size, does not correspond to its ancient fame, because of its ever-repeated seizure and its wars. For since the city has lain in the midst of barbarians now for so long a time—barbarians, too, who are virtually the most warlike of all—it is always in a state of war and has often been captured . . . . For that reason the fortune of the Greeks in that region reached a very low ebb indeed. (*Borysth.* 4–5 [Or. 36])

It is this situation of a Greek city in decline, enclosed in largely barbarian territory, that forms the appropriate narrative context for Dio's exposition of the Stoic doctrine of dual citizenship. Within this endangered city, Dio is to expound his views on the existence of two different sorts of cities.

When Dio approaches the city of Borysthenes (*Borysth.* 1 [Or. 36]), he is overtaken by a certain Callistratus, who is on his way to the city (*Borysth.* 7 [Or. 36]). He is about eighteen years of age, in high repute with his fellow townsmen, interested in oratory and philosophy, and—like practically all the people of Borysthenes—fond of Homer (*Borysth.* 8–9 [Or. 36]): "... although in general they no longer speak Greek distinctly, because they live in the midst of barbarians, still almost all at least know the *Iliad* by heart" (*Borysth.* 9 [Or. 36]).

Dio tries to broaden Callistratus's horizon, and starts a discussion about the sixth-century BCE poet Phocylides of Miletus (*Borysth.* 10–15

<sup>13</sup> For the enslavement to the elements of the cosmos, see G.H. van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology* (WUNT 2.171; Tübingen 2003), 59–79.

[*Or.* 36]), unknown to Callistratus and the Borystheneans, and one of whose maxims Dio chooses "since in my opinion he speaks very nobly regarding the city" (*Borysth.* 15 [*Or.* 36]). The maxim from Phocylides reads as follows:

This too the saying of Phocylides: The law-abiding town, though small and set on a lofty rock, outranks mad Nineveh. (*Borysth.* 13 [*Or.* 36])

This maxim proves to be susceptible of a Stoic interpretation in terms of two cities, as Dio's paraphrase already shows: "... a small city on a rugged headland is better and more fortunate, if orderly, than a great city in a smooth and level plain, that is to say, if that city is conducted in disorderly and lawless fashion by men of folly" (*Borysth.* 13 [*Or.* 36]).

In this way Dio differentiates between orderly and disorderly cities. Dio's suggestion to discuss Phocylides is accepted by Callistratus, while they are being joined by people from within the walls of Borysthenes (*Borysth.* 7, 15 [*Or.* 36]). In fact, Callistratus welcomes the topic of the city as being particularly relevant to him and his fellow citizens, as just the day before the Scythians had made a partially successful raid on the city (*Borysth.* 15 [*Or.* 36]). Despite their circumstances the Borystheneans wish to learn from Dio about the city: "they were such ardent listeners, so truly Greek in character that almost all the inhabitants were present, under arms, eager to hear me" (*Borysth.* 16 [*Or.* 36]). At Dio's suggestion, they enter the heavily guarded city and move to the precincts of the temple of Zeus (*Borysth.* 16–17 [*Or.* 36]).

As soon as quiet is secured, Dio pays them a compliment, saying that in his opinion "they did well, seeing that they dwelt in a city that was ancient and Greek, in wishing to hear about a city" (*Borysth.* 18 [*Or.* 36]). Linking up with the maxim of Phocylides which he quoted outside the gates, Dio gives a preliminary definition of "city":

... the term "city" is said to mean a group of *anthrōpoi* dwelling in the same place and governed by law. It is immediately evident, therefore, that that term belongs to none of those communities which are called cities but are without wisdom and without law. Consequently not even in referring to Nineveh could the poet use the term "city," since Nineveh is given over to folly. For just as that person is not even an *anthrōpos* who does not also possess the attribute of reason, so that community is not even a city which lacks obedience to law. And it could never be obedient to law if it is foolish and disorderly. (*Borysth.* 20 [*Or.* 36])

There are, then, clearly two sorts of cities, and only the orderly sort of city can claim to be really a city in the proper sense of the definition. In what follows, and in the same vain as Plato and Seneca before him, Dio even

questions whether there are good cities on earth. The two kinds of cities are explicitly defined as “a city of mortal men” and “a city of the blessed gods in heaven,” respectively:

no one knows of a good city made wholly of good elements as having existed in the past, that is, a city of mortal men, nor is it worth while to conceive of such a city as possibly arising in the future, unless it be a city of the blessed gods in heaven . . . . For that, indeed, is the only constitution or city that may be called genuinely happy—the partnership of god with god; even if you include with the gods also everything that has the faculty of reason . . . . However, if we take communities of a different kind, though everywhere and in every instance, we may almost say, they are absolutely faulty and worthless as compared with the supreme righteousness of the divine and blessed law and its proper administration.

(*Borysth.* 22–23 [*Or.* 36])

Once Dio gives this definition of the two cities, one of the Borystheneans, a certain Hieroson, “the eldest in the company and held in high esteem” (*Borysth.* 24 [*Or.* 36]), interrupts him, and “makes himself know as one of those inhabitants of Borysthenes who do not only love Homer, but Plato, too.” He observes that in his remarks Dio has “touched upon the divine form of government (*hē theia dioikēsis*)” (*Borysth.* 26 [*Or.* 36]) and, under reference to the current threat which the Borystheneans are experiencing from the Scythians, asks him if he could focus on the heavenly city instead of on the earthly, mortal city:

This, then, is our situation; and if you wish to do us all a favour, postpone your discussion of the mortal city (*hē thnētē polis*)—possibly our neighbours may after all grant us leisure tomorrow, and not compel us to exert ourselves against them as is generally our wont—and tell us instead about that divine city or government, whichever you prefer to call it, stating where it is and what it is like.

(*Borysth.* 27 [*Or.* 36])

Dio, of course, is pleased to comply with this request, and continues with his exposition of the Stoic doctrine of the heavenly city. He explains that the Stoics apply the term “city” in a metaphorical way to the cosmos. They can do so because the orderly constitution of the cosmos resembles the orderly arrangement of a city’s administration (*Borysth.* 29–30 [*Or.* 36]). According to Dio, some also apply the term “home of Zeus” to the cosmos, but he himself believes that the term “city” is more appropriate (*Borysth.* 36–37 [*Or.* 36]).<sup>14</sup> In his further elaboration on the divine,

<sup>14</sup> For the designation of the cosmic city as “house of Zeus/God,” cf. also Pseudo-Paul’s Eph 2:19, where pagan Christians, who were outside the *politeuma* of Israel, are now considered to be *oikeioi tou theou*. For an interpretation of Ephesians in the light of the

heavenly city, Dio makes the following two important points. First, the nature of the cosmic, heavenly city appears to be restrictive; not all living beings form part of it, but only those who “have a share in reason and intellect.” Secondly, although selective in this sense, membership of the cosmic city is open to people from all social and ethnic backgrounds. This is explicitly contrasted with the practice of an earthly city like that of Sparta, where the Helots, the servile population, are excluded from Spartan citizenship:

This, then, is the theory of the philosophers, a theory which sets up a noble and benevolent fellowship of gods and men which gives a share in law and citizenship, not to all living beings whatsoever, but only to such as have a share in reason and intellect, introducing a far better and more righteous code than that of Sparta, in accordance with which the Helots have no prospect of ever becoming Spartans, and consequently are constantly plotting against Sparta. (Borysth. 38 [Or. 36])

By contrast, citizenship of the divine, heavenly city is open to all, regardless of social and ethnic background.

##### 5. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: DEPOLITICIZATION OF POLITICS AND CRITICISM OF ETHNOCENTRISM

There appear to be many points of comparison between the Stoic doctrine of two citizens and Paul's argumentation in Gal 4.

(a) First, the antithesis between “the present Jerusalem,” which “is in slavery with her children,” and “the Jerusalem above,” which “is free” (Gal 4:25–26), resembles the Stoic antithesis between the earthly, “mortal” city and the divine, heavenly city. Often, biblical scholars refer to the Jewish pseudepigrapha as the proper background for Paul's antithesis and state that these writings rework the notion from the book of Exodus that God, during his instruction of Moses, showed him “the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture”:

And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it . . . . And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. (Exod 25:8–9, 40)

---

Stoic notion of the cosmic city, see van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology*, 175–179; cf. Brown, “Natural Law,” 359–360: “The early Christians . . . cultivated a worldwide city of god as the cosmopolis of the wise,” with reference to Eph 2:20 in n. 66.

According to Dunn, for instance, the echo of this passage in the Jewish pseudepigrapha also sounds in Paul's Letter to the Galatians:

Here Paul clearly has in mind the strand of Jewish apocalyptic thought which presumed that there was a heavenly Jerusalem, that is, an ideal form of Jerusalem in the purpose of God, waiting, as it were, in heaven to be revealed at the end time, when God's purpose would be completely fulfilled. This was obviously based on Exod. 25:9, 40 (cf. Wisd. Sol. 9:8), where Moses was told to construct the tabernacle in accordance with the pattern shown him on the mountain.<sup>15</sup>

And indeed, Jewish apocalyptic thought does reflect this passage from Exodus. In *Second Baruch*, for instance, the author develops an antithesis between the city which "will be delivered up for a time" (the historical, earthly Jerusalem), and the city which God has carved on the palms of his hands (4:1–2).

There are, however, important differences, I would argue, between the Jewish apocalyptic notion of the new Jerusalem and Paul's stoicizing notion of the heavenly city of Jerusalem. The former is clearly to be seen in an eschatological perspective. According to *Second Baruch* the city engraved on the palms of God's hands "is not this building that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed, with me" (4:3). It was prepared from the moment that God decided to create paradise, and was shown to Adam, Abraham, and to Moses on Mount Sinai; "now it is preserved with me—as also paradise" (4:6), to be revealed in the future. This is also the case in *Fourth Ezra*. In a passage which predicts the temporary messianic kingdom and the end of the world, the eschatological manifestation of the new Jerusalem is described as follows: "the city which now is not seen shall appear" (7:26). The city of the new Jerusalem is built at the end of times (8:50–52). In one of Ezra's visions the female figure of the historical Jerusalem disappears and is replaced with a new city on earth: "And I looked, and behold, the woman was no longer visible to me, but there was an established city, and a place of huge foundations showed itself" (4 Ezra 10:27). The interpretation of the angel Uriel for Ezra shows that the new Jerusalem, "the city of the Most High" reveals itself on earth at the end of time, on a field which has never been built upon:

For now the Most High, seeing that you are sincerely grieved and profoundly distressed for her, has shown you the brightness of her glory, and the loveliness of her beauty. Therefore I told you to remain in the field

---

<sup>15</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; London 1993), 253.

where no house had been built, for I knew that the Most High would reveal these things to you. Therefore I told you to go into the field where there was no foundation of any building, for no work of man's building could endure in a place where the city of the Most High was to be revealed.

(4 *Ezra* 10:50–54)

Whereas the new Jerusalem in these Jewish apocalyptic writings is primarily something which is to be eschatologically revealed on earth (cf. also 4 *Ezra* 13:36), Paul, like the Stoics, speaks about a present differentiation between an earthly and a heavenly city. Moreover, the notion of a heavenly city is not isolated in Paul but must also underlie his view in the Letter to the Philippians that Christians are citizens of heaven: their *politeuma* is in heaven (Phil 3:20) and consequently they should behave as its citizens (1:27). This clearly runs parallel with the Platonic-Stoic view that there are two commonwealths or two cities, which imply a dual citizenship for those who are also members of the heavenly city.<sup>16</sup> This similarity between the Christian and Platonic Stoic notions of the heavenly city is explicitly acknowledged by the pagan convert to Christianity Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–216 CE), who writes the following:

But I shall pray the Spirit of Christ to wing me to my Jerusalem. For the Stoics say that heaven is properly a city, but places here on earth are not cities; for they are called so, but are not. For a city is an important thing, and the people a decorous body, and a multitude of men regulated by law as the church by the word—a city on earth impregnable—free from tyranny; a product of the divine will on earth as in heaven. Images of this city the poets create with their pen. For the Hyperboreans, and the Arimaspians, and the Elysian plains, are commonwealths of just men. And we know Plato's city placed as a pattern in heaven.

(Clement, *Strom.* 4.26 [ANF 2:441])

Paul's views on the earthly and heavenly Jerusalem, then, seem to incorporate the Stoic notion of two cities.

(b) Secondly, the antithesis between the earthly and the heavenly city gains sharp relief both in Paul's letter and in Stoic thought when the vulnerability and weakness of the earthly city within this pair of opposites is being emphasized. As we have seen, in Dio Chrysostom's thirty-sixth oration, *Borysthenitica* (*Borysthenic Discourse*), the city of Borysthenes, although a Greek foundation, is surrounded by barbarian territory and just the day before has been raided by the Scythians. It is within the

<sup>16</sup> Paul's acquaintance with this view is easily recognized by classicists. See, e.g., Shorey, who refers to, among other passages, Gal 4:26 and Eph 2:19. See Plato, *The Republic* (Shorey, LCL), 6:414–415nb.

heavily guarded gates of this city, in the local temple of Zeus, that Dio speaks about the divine, heavenly city. It is hard to imagine a starker contrast than that between the ideal city of the Stoics and earthly politics. Indeed, as Schofield notes:

... at the heart of the conception of the mutual society of the gods that Dio has sketched is the idea of a form of common life in which there is no internal strife nor the possibility of defeat by external forces .... This idea is diametrically opposed to the Borystheneans' current situation in every dimension Dio has got us to think of. No wonder they are so attracted to it. As often, the dispossessed prefer the prospect of heaven to political thought.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the term "prospect of heaven" in this context does not do full justice to the Stoic notion of the cosmic city as no eschatological reference to the end of times is implied. Rather, this notion is about the "awareness of a heavenly reality," in the sense that apart from an earthly, political situation, there is at the same time an alternative cosmic society, inhabited by the gods and the Stoic sages, which transcends geopolitical commonwealths and cities. But Schofield is right about the way in which Dio maximalizes the contrast between the earthly and heavenly cities by stressing the vulnerability of Borysthenes, which is the ideal background for an exposition of the Stoic doctrine of dual citizenship. The same strategy can be recognized in Paul's description of the present Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above; the former "is in slavery with her children," the latter "is free, and she is our mother" (Gal 4:25–26). Like Borysthenes, Jerusalem is threatened, and even subdued by foreign forces—those of Rome. And in Jerusalem the presence of the Roman forces can be rather intimidating. Although Paul writes his Letter to the Galatians on the threshold between the Claudian and the Neronian eras, the recent history of Caligula and Jerusalem in the early 40s CE will still have been at the back of every Jew's mind. In Paul's description of the present Jerusalem as being in slavery, as opposed to the freedom of the heavenly Jerusalem, we get a rare insight into Paul's view on political issues. In a way very similar to Dio, Paul seems to transcend the confines of earthly politics and to emphasize the freedom which characterizes the heavenly *politeuma*.

(c) Thirdly, there is an interesting tension between the way in which both Dio and Paul transcend the ethnic and political interests of a particular, specific city on earth but, at the same time, still value the importance

<sup>17</sup> Schofield, *Stoic Idea*, 63.

of political vocabulary by speaking of the divine heavenly city and its citizenship. Indeed, as Schofield noted, this political vocabulary is radically transformed. According to him, Stoicism did not advocate

... a world state: a political system in which the unity of all mankind would find expression .... As developed by Chrysippus, the ideal city of Zeno's *Republic* is indeed in a sense a universal community, whose citizens ... are *kosmopolitai*. However, it is universal not that it includes all mankind, but because it is made up of gods and sages wherever they may be: not a wider community, but a wholly different sort of "community." When Chrysippus uses words like "city" and "law," he intends a radical transformation of their meaning, robbing them of anything ordinarily recognizable as political content. In short, political vocabulary is depoliticized.<sup>18</sup>

This also holds true for Paul. The citizenship which he advocates is a citizenship in heaven. By emphasizing the freedom of the Jerusalem above, despite the politically difficult situation of the present Jerusalem, Paul is able to direct his attention, and that of his readers and communities, to an altogether different reality. This heavenly reality, although described in political vocabulary, is fundamentally depoliticized.

(d) Finally, the depoliticized, universal stature of the heavenly city goes very well together with, and even seems to imply a profound criticism of, ethnicity. We have seen that Seneca emphasizes that the heavenly city is a universal, non-ethnic community, whereas this is not true of the earthly city, "the one to which we have been assigned by the accident of birth. This will be the commonwealth of the Athenians or of the Carthaginians, or of any other city that belongs, not to all, but to some particular race of men" (Seneca, *De otio* 4.1). Although Seneca expounds the idea that there are two commonwealths, and that it is possible to "yield service to both commonwealths at the same time" (4.1), he is very critical of the earthly political sphere. Sages such as Zeno and Chrysippus, who did not hold public office but led an "inactive," "contemplative" life of "leisure," may "govern the ages to come, and speak, not to the ears of the few, but to the ears of all men of all nations (... *nec apud paucos contionetur, sed apud omnis omnium gentium homines*), both those who now are and those who shall be" (6.4). The wise man, according to a disillusioned Seneca, will nowhere find a state to which he can attach himself. Neither the Athenian nor the Carthaginian state is an option, and from both he will flee. "If I should attempt to enumerate them one by one, I should not find a single

<sup>18</sup> Schofield, "Social and Political Thought," 768.



one which could tolerate the wise man or which the wise man could tolerate" (8.1–3). The only city to which the sage can attach himself is the heavenly city.

In a similar way Dio Chrysostom lauds the non-ethnic, universal nature of the heavenly city. Whereas the servile population of Sparta, the Helots, are excluded from the city's citizenship, the citizenship of the heavenly city is open to all, regardless of their social and ethnic status, with the only restriction being that they use their reason and intellect in the right way (*Borysth.* 38 [*Or.* 36]).

The same universal, ethnicity-free passion colours Paul's Letter to the Galatians. Already at the climax of the first passage on Abraham in Gal 3, Paul concluded:

... in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.  
(Gal 3:26–29)

And, as we have seen, the second passage on Abraham, in Gal 4, also shows the same tendency. The genealogical claims to be a son of Abraham are now countered, in a provocative way, by the statement "that Abraham had *two* sons" (Gal 4:21–22). The question for Paul is not whether one is a son of Abraham, since both Jews and non-Jews can be physical descendants of Abraham, either through Hagar and her son Ishmael, or through Sarah and her son Isaac. If there are two possible genealogical lineages, the actual question is who the *true* son of Abraham is. Paul proposes to solve this question by way of allegorical reasoning. As he had already explained in his first passage on Abraham, according to Paul the true descendants of Abraham emulate Abraham's character, by trusting God as he did:

Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" [cf. Gen 15:6], so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you" [cf. Gen 12:3; 18:18]. (Gal 3:6–8)

In his second passage on Abraham, in Gal 4, in which he involves both of Abraham's sons, Paul is now even able to invert the ethnic-genealogical claims in a very poignant manner. Ethnocentric Jews such as Paul's opponents cannot claim genealogical descent from Abraham via Sarah but belong, metaphorically speaking, to the lineage of Hagar.

True "Jews," such as Paul himself and the pagan converts from Galatia whom he wishes to convince with his letter, are those who are descended, again metaphorically speaking, from Sarah. For that reason they do not have to submit themselves to a narrow ethnocentric definition of Judaism. In this way, Paul not only criticizes the dominant, ethnocentric understanding of Judaism but also offers a variety of genealogical claims, which he subsequently inverts and interprets in an allegorical way. As a consequence, it is Hagar through whom ethnocentric Jews are descended from Abraham; they cannot claim to be *the* sons of Abraham as Abraham had two sons. "True Jews" are those who emulate Abraham's true religion, trusting God in his promise to bless the nations through Abraham.

As we have seen, this line of reasoning was also developed by Greco-Roman authors who criticized particular genealogical claims. In Plato's *Theaetetus* Socrates criticizes genealogical claims for their one-sided focus on one particular ancestor, whereas "every man has had countless thousands of ancestors and progenitors, among whom have been in any instance rich and poor, kings and slaves, barbarians and Greeks" (175a). Consequently, the philosopher derides those who claim to be descendants of the hero-god Heracles; their ideas are petty and absurd to him (175a–b). Such claims with regard to Heracles were frequent, issued by individuals, cities and states alike and, as we have seen, continued to draw philosophical criticism. According to Plutarch, the claim of "being descended from Heracles does not bestow any advantage, unless we *do* the sort of things for which he was manifestly the most glorious and most noble of all mankind, and unless we practice and learn what is good our whole life long" (*Apoph. Lac.* 226A). True Heraclids are not those who are descended from Heracles (*hoi aph' Hērakleous*), but men like Heracles (*hoi hoios Hēraklēs*), who show the same excellence as he did (*Apoph. Lac.* 229F).<sup>19</sup> This is the same technique of inverting genealogical claims as we encounter in Paul.

This profound criticism of ethnicity is now crowned by Paul's inclusion of the Stoic doctrine of the earthly and the heavenly city. It is the latter notion, that of the heavenly, supra-ethnic, depoliticized, cosmic city, which disposes of any remaining ethnic inclinations. The earthly Jerusalem, symbolized through the figure of Hagar, is subject to the present political circumstances; she is "in slavery with her children," whereas the true metropolis, the heavenly city, which Paul advocates, is free.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Plutarch, *Vit. pud.* 535A–B; Dio Chrysostom, 4 *Regn.* 72 (*Or.* 4).

# Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites

Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives  
on Kinship with Abraham

*Edited by*

Martin Goodman  
George H. van Kooten  
Jacques T.A.G.M. van Ruiten

*Editorial Assistance*

Albertina Oegema



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON

2010

# Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions

## *Editorial Board*

George H. van Kooten  
Robert A. Kugler  
Loren T. Stuckenbruck

## *Advisory Board*

Reinhard Feldmeier  
Judith Lieu  
Florentino García Martínez  
Hindy Najman  
Martti Nissinen  
Ed Noort

VOLUME 13